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NOTE.

FOR+SUBJECT+INFINITIVE.

In the fourth chapter of my dissertation, "The Accusative with Infinitive and some Kindred Constructions in English" (New York, 1908), I gave my theory of the construction *for*+subject+infinitive, and, assuming its complete identity with the expression *than for*+subject+infinitive, I ventured to dispute Professor Jespersen's assertion that "Such sentences as 'I don't know what is worse *than for such wicked strumpets to lay* their sins at honest men's doors' (Fielding) would be sought in vain before the eighteenth century" (Jespersen, *Growth and Structure of the English Language*, § 211). As my thesis contained no early example of the usage with *than for*, Professor Jespersen felt justified in challenging my objection, and in an article in the *Viëtor Festschrift* (85-89), he emphatically reasserted his first statement with the remark: "I venture to maintain that there is every justification for my assertion until some one brings forward an earlier example of the same construction."

Before I proceed to answer Professor Jespersen's challenge, I should like to set down a useful maxim for the guidance of students of grammar. It is with grammar much as with the art of fiction. It is not necessary that a thing should actually happen in order to make it possible, and evidence of the possibility of a construction may frequently be regarded as equivalent to evidence of its existence. To question every statement not supported by an actual citation might prove almost as dangerous as to require the novelist to refer to the newspaper file for every incident which he introduces. It is an attitude the converse of which leads to the equally deceptive conclusion that everything which exists is possible, that every construction of which some example can be found is *ipso facto* a legitimate construction. This much in vindication of my own apparent rashness in assuming the existence of a construction which I had not encountered in my own reading of early literature. I might find fault with Professor Jespersen for an error of a different nature. He asserted and reasserted the generalization of a negative, which in its very nature was incapable of proof. Had I been unable to produce a single bit of evidence of the kind demanded by Professor Jespersen, I should still have adhered to my earlier view, though I should have done so in silence. But fortunately I have met with two examples of the construction in question, antedating Fielding by one and a half and two centuries, and the conspicuousness of one of the writers involved merely emphasizes the danger I have alluded to.

When I cited (Accusative with Infinitive, 140) such sentences as "*for me to put* him to his purgation would perhaps plunge him into far more choler" (*Hamlet*), and "*for him, though almost on certain proof, to give* it hearing, not belief, deserves my hate *for ever*", (*Mas-*

singer, *Duke of Milan*, IV, ii), I felt that I had given sufficient evidence that the construction for+subject+infinitive had attained complete independence, that it was now a separate unit, and that it could therefore be introduced by *than* or *as* without the least suggestion of violence to the idiom. Professor Jespersen speaks of the examples I have just quoted as stage II in the development of the construction and supposes that "this stage was not reached till about 1600." The third stage, the use with *than* or *as*, may, he thinks, "seem a simple consequence of stage II, but as a matter of fact it looks as if it took a century to pass from stage II to stage III, my oldest quotations being here from the beginning of the eighteenth century." Unfortunately the development of a vital linguistic expression refuses to conform to this neat architectural scheme. We discover an example of the third stage as early as 1553, and at once the whole orderly fabric falls to the ground. It is in Wilson's *Art of Rhetoric*, on the very first page of the Prologue to the Reader: "What greater pride can there be *then for any man to thinke* himself wise....or what greater folly can there be imagined, *then for one to think*, etc" (ed. Main, 1909). Another example occurs in Bacon's *Essays*: "Nothing doth extinguish envy more *than for a great person to preserve* all other inferior officers in their full rights" (Of Envy). I think I have brought forward the proof which Professor Jespersen demanded. Clearly the construction with *than* was possible in the sixteenth century, even if it was not common, and it would be rash to assume that these are the only two examples that occur between 1500 and 1700.

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